

“Many believe that the criminal justice system in The Bahamas needs revision to adequately address crime in the country. Reflecting on Dr. King’s principles and teachings, what would you recommend?”

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“I am concerned about a better world. I’m concerned about justice; I’m concerned about truth. And when one is concerned about these he can never advocate violence. For through violence you may murder a murderer, but you can’t murder murder, through violence you might murder a liar but you can’t establish truth, through violence you may murder a hater but you can’t murder hate. Darkness cannot put out darkness. Only light can do that.”

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
August 1967 Atlanta, Georgia**

The same question that Dr. King asked in his last speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta Georgia in August of 1967 is the same question that must be asked by Bahamian society with respect to the issue of crime in The Bahamas, that is, “Where do we go from here?” Many believe that the criminal justice system in the Bahamas needs revision to adequately address crime in this country. While I agree that some revision may be necessary, I am of the view that this step may not be as adequate in addressing the problem of crime as those calling for the revision believe.

My position is based on the undeniable fact that crime is a social problem. A social problem requires a social solution. Solving crime requires that each member of society begins to take responsibility for the state of crime in The Bahamas and adjust his or her behaviour to improve the situation. This was essentially the position of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He believed that a social problem required a social response. That social response was not to do what you always did, that is, be complacent or to respond violently, but to act differently – that difference was to demonstrate love and to practice nonviolence.

Dr. King recognized the limits of the law in creating the social change he dreamt of, because, after all, the law was used to create the social injustice he was fighting. This is why the extract from his speech is important because it recognizes the futility of fighting a wrong with a wrong. Violence will only beget violence. Violence never makes anything better. In his 1959 *Sermon of Ghandi* Dr. King stated that “the aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community”. In contrast, the aftermath of

violence is more violence. This is why murdering the murderer -- state sponsored executions or taking revenge --, will not end murder. Murdering the liar -- punishing dishonesty -- will not mean that people will stop being dishonest. Murdering the person who you hate does not mean that you will never hate again for the simple reason that hate begins in the heart.

Central to Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence was his belief that nonviolence was a higher synthesis relying on the power of moral conscience, and moral conscience was the light that could put out darkness. If a person has to question his own ethics or examine his own actions, he believed, that person would be more apt to think twice before acting. Therefore, by confronting persons with their own "wrongness" you force them to see how "ugly" they really are.

I believe that criminality and a culture of violence in any community is a state of mind, it is behaviour, and no behavior is changed necessarily because of the threat of criminal punishment. The answer to create social change therefore is not in the law, but in the transformation of individual minds and hearts.

Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence says "turn the other cheek" and "love your enemies". He noted that turning the other cheek and loving your enemies applied only to conflicts between individuals. In this respect, his philosophy is worth examination, because, in The Bahamas, the majority of the criminal matters about which persons are concerned are those that are crimes against the person. According to statements made by members of the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the majority of the murders that have occurred was due to the inability of the persons involved to resolve their conflicts without violence or, as Dr. King said, "to turn the other cheek".

Attention to crime in the Bahamas, particularly in the last year, has been due to the unprecedented level of violent crime – assaults against the person, murder and the use of firearms and other weapons. However, I am of the view that all who are calling for the revision of the criminal justice system to deal with this violence, or who see it as a solution to crime, are engaging in, as Dr. King said, "the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and not the underlying causes."¹

In the Bahamas much is said about the relationship between crime and the breakdown of the family. The family is the foundation of society. If this is so, crime has a social cause, and its solution must therefore be social. The revision of the criminal justice system can only be a part of a greater whole.

It is my recommendation therefore, that in addressing crime in The Bahamas, the social conditions that contribute to crime must also be addressed. Greater emphasis must be put into creating social programs and social supports that cause the citizens of this country to recognize their responsibility to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem, to recognize that, no matter how many laws are made, those laws will never

¹ Taken from Dr. King's letter, "Why we can't wait", written from a Birmingham jail in 1963 in response to criticism of his nonviolent methods.

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prevent crime, and to encourage them to take responsibility and to become partners, so that they can feel confident they have a community of persons who think like they do.

It is my view that recognition of the social aspect of crime and seeking to address it by social methods symbolizes what was fundamental to Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence, that is, correcting or changing the social problem can only be found in the social solution. To seek to address the issue of crime in The Bahamas by only addressing the problems in the judicial system is to seek to use the same methods that have not brought about any change.

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